DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 710 EA 024 512

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TITLE Teacher Perception of Principal Behaviors: A Research Study.
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Knoxville, TN, November 10-13, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Characteristics; Administrator Effectiveness; Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; *Principals; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that investigated teachers' perceptions of the most desirable characteristics of principal behavior are presented in this paper. An instrument used to measure employees' perceptions of business manager characteristics (Kouzes and Posner 1987) was adapted to the educational setting and completed by 1,225 teachers in 4 states. Findings indicated that teachers' rankings of their principals were similar to business employees' rankings of their managers. Both groups said that honesty was the most desirable and necessary characteristics for managers and principals. Other highly rated characteristics included "forward-looking," "inspiring," "caring," and "competent." One figure and two tables are included. (Contains 10 references.) (LMI)

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TEACHER PERCEPTION OF PRINCIPAL BEHAVIORS: A RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to determine teacher's perceptions of the most desirable characteristics of principal behavior, the researchers surveyed 1225 teachers in four states using the instrument developed by Kouzes and Posner in *The Leadership Challenge* to measure the attitudes of business employees to their managers. The instrument was adapted for use with teachers.

The rankings of teachers was very similar to the rankings of the business employees for their managers. Both groups perceived that managers and principals should demonstrate "honesty" more than any other characteristic. Other competencies ranked high by teachers were: forward-looking, inspiring, caring, and competent. The results of the two groups, teachers and business employees, were analyzed for further comparisons and a profile of ideal principal characteristics were identified. Chi-square analysis revealed five areas of significant relationship between teacher perceptions of principal behavior.

Obviously, every administrator cannot demonstrate all the competencies which the teachers believe are important; however, they should be made aware of teacher's perceptions and use this information as a guide to improve practice. Consequently, this research should receive attention from researchers, teachers and administrators.

Introduction

Current tends in education include increased emphasis on developing leadership. Educational literature abounds with articles describing the ideal school being headed by a strong, visionary leader who promotes an atmosphere of collegiality and participation in a student oriented school (Hansen & Liften, 1991). State mandates include advanced degrees for principals and often tie financial rewards to training for leadership (Rutherford, 1985). This combination of high-powered leadership, professional staff, and close oversight for maximum performance sounds like a sure prescription for educational reform. It is the teacher, however, who carries out educational reform. Teachers have the power to implement or foil the best goals, plans, and mandates when the classroom door is closed. "Clearly principals are a key to the learning process. But to think that a school can be better than its teachers is folly" (Doyle & Hartle, 1985, p. 23). It is obvious from the nature of the job, that many teachers must possess qualities of leadership and expect certain behaviors from their leaders (Lewis, 1986).

Characteristics of principals

Numerous studies have illustrated the dynamic nature of the principalship, to the point that the lists of attributes or skills of good principals often becomes confusing (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). Rutherford (1985) discusses leadership qualities from the perspective of the school principal. He states that effective principals:

> 1) have clear, informed visions of what they want their schools to become--visions that focus on students and their needs; 2) translate these visions into goals for their schools and expectations for the teachers, students and administrators; 3) establish school climates that support programs toward these goals and expectations; 4) continuously monitor progress; and 5) intervene in a supportive and corrective manner, when this seems necessary. (p. 32).

Champlin (1987) identified seven critical factors of leadership that will facilitate positive change:

> 1) the creation of a supporting, enabling environment; 2) the presence of clear, attainable goals that are publicized and constantly in use; 3) the presence of a change agent who can effectively break the equilibrium holding an organization in place; 4) the use of a systematic, planned process that is open and subject to alteration; 5) the involvement of the community as an active partner and participant in any major change; 6) the presence of effective leadership with vision, a sense of mission,

a goodly measure of courage, and 7) a commitment to renewal that disallows compromising for lesser attainments and always aspires to higher levels of sophistication. (p 51).

There are numerous other lists of principal characteristics, however these suffice to demonstrate the varied nature of the position. It is from the teacher's viewpoint that these attitudes need to be examined.

Teacher viewpoint

First, the teacher should to be able to accept the vision, mission, and philosophy as perceived by the teacher (Russell, 1985). When strong personalities work together there is always the temptation for the teacher to believe that his or her priorities are more important than those of the official leader. Teachers need to be aware of the importance of embracing the vision and goals of the leader. No organization can develop to its fullest potential while strong personalities are vying for leadership and the creative energies of the school are lost on conflict (Collins & Hanson, 1991).

Second, the teacher should be able to follow the leader's direction with regard to change. The teacher needs to be a team player, able to cooperate with the leader's strategy. A teacher who is unwilling to play by the leader's rules risks not only losing for themselves, but the team as well (Collins & Hanson, 1991).

Third, the teacher should be cautious in reacting to the attitudes of colleagues who resist innovation and change. This is one of the most problematical areas for many teachers. The teacher must listen to others

frustrations, avoid criticism, and all them to respond to change within their own parameters. Little mention is made of this role of the teacher, but it is in the back hall, over the lunch table, and in after school chats that the best conceived plans are sabotaged (Glatthorn, 1987).

Fourth, the teacher should recognize and accept the leader's responsibility to monitor, and intervene when performance does not correspond to vision. By the very nature of education, we are continually monitoring student progress and directing performance in accordance with our goals and purposes . The leadership role of the principal includes the responsibility to provide accountability, yet provide autonomy in order for innovation and creativity to be exhibited (Glatthorn, 1987).

Thus we see that good leadership, combined with teachers who are able to accept their leader's vision and game plan, present a positive model to colleagues, and be open to monitoring can be a high powered package for educational reform (Hansen & Liftin, 1991).

Methodology

Kouzes and Posner (1987) in their outstanding book, The Leadership Challenge outlined a list of twenty characteristics that business managers thought leaders should possess (see Table I). The authors used the same instrument developed by Kouzes and Posner and asked teachers what characteristics of principals where important for leadership, ie., "What are the characteristics of principals that make them leaders?" We used the instrument (Figure I) during the past four years in several opportunities to

question teachers about their perceptions of principals. These responses were obtained from teachers in four states without regard to randomness. The teachers were either participants in graduate education classes or participants in executive seminars conducted by the authors.

Data analysis

The teacher responses were ranked with percentages of respondents indicated. The responses were also subjected to chi-square analysis to determine the relationship between the observed values and the expected values of each category.

Discussion

According to the study conducted by Kouzes and Posner (1987, p. 17) the top five "characteristics of superior leaders" as determined by business managers were the following:

1) honest was ranked number one by 83 percent of the respondents
2) competent was ranked number two by 67 percent of the respondents
3) forward-looking was ranked number three by 62 percent of the respondents
4) inspiring was ranked number four by 58 percent of the respondents

5) intelligent was ranked number five by 43 percent of the respondents.

Teachers differed very little from the business managers in their perceptions of what constituted the characteristics of principals as leaders. Table II reports the results. An interesting comparison between the top five responses in both surveys indicate a high degree of similarity between the two groups. Only one variable was different, number five for the business managers was intelligent while number five for teachers was caring.

TABLE I

Characteristics of superior leaders

	U. S. Managers (N=2,615)	
Characteristic	**Ranking**	**Percentage Selecting**
Honest	1	83
Competent	2	67
Forward-looking	3	62
Inspiring	4	58
Intelligent	5	43
Fair-minded	6	40
Broad-minded	7	37
Straightforward	8	34
Imaginative	9	34
Dependable	10	33
Supportive	11	32
Courageous	12	27
Caring	13	26
Cooperative	14	25
Mature	15	23
Ambitious	16	21
Determined	17	20
Self-controlled	18	13
Loyal	19	11
Independent	20	10

Adapted from Kouzes and Posner (1987), p. 17.

TABLE II

Characteristics of principals as leaders

	Teachers (N=1,225)	
Characteristic	**Ranking**	**Percentage Selecting**
Honest	1	69.14*
Competent	2	59.59*
Forward-looking	3	48.00*
Inspiring	4	32.73*
Caring	5	30.69*
Supportive	6	29.96
Intelligent	7	28.98
Fair-minded	8	26.20
Cooperative	9	25.22
Straightforward	10	24.73
Courageous	11	19.67
Loyal	12	19.18
Dependable	13	17.88
Broad-minded	14	11.51
Imaginative	15	9.31
Mature	16	7.84
Self-controlled	17	6.61
Independent	18	6.29
Determined	19	5.63
Ambitious	20	3.75

*Chi-square analysis significant at the .001 level.

Conclusions and Implications

The similarities between the business managers and teachers perceptions of principals is striking. Seven characteristics rank in the top ten of each survey. Obviously, more research is needed from a more representative sample of teachers to make valid determinations of the importance of the study. However, the implications for principals is obvious, the more a principal understanding the expectations of their performance, the better able they should be to fulfill the obligations of their job.

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FIGURE I

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRINCIPALS AS LEADERS

	RANKING	
	INDIVIDUAL	GROUP
1. AMBITIOUS		
2. BROAD-MINDED		
3. CARING		
4. COMPETENT		
5. COOPERATIVE		
6 COURAGEOUS		
7. DEPENDABLE		
8. DETERMINED		
9. FAIR-MINDED		
10. FORWARD-LOOKING		
11. HONEST		
12. IMAGINATIVE		
13. INDEPENDENT		
14. INSPIRING		
15. INTELLIGENT		
16. LOYAL		
17. MATURE		
18. SELF-CONTROLLED		
19. STRAIGHTFORWARD		
20. SUPPORTIVE		

Adapted from: Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. (1987). The leadership challenge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 16-27.